

**The Rhythm of life:
Virtues, Postures and Practices**



A Proposal to the Moot Community

Ian Mobsby and Aaron Kennedy

Contents

Part 1: Background and Rationale

- 3 Our Vocation as a Community**
- 6 Our Evolving Context**
- 7 New hope and a future**

Part 2: Virtues, Postures and Practices

- 10 Spiritual Practices**
- 10 Spiritual Postures**
- 10 Virtues and the Thoughts that Distort Us**
- 13 Application**
- 14 Some Useful Quotations**
- 16 Bibliography**

Our Vocation as a Community

New Monastic

Rhythms, or rules, of life can be understood as responses to widespread cultural trends. The traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were a reaction against money, sex and power – issues that had begun to dominate the Church from the time of its alignment to the Roman State in the fourth century, CE. Moot's rhythm of life can be understood as a response to consumerism, individualism, greed and the cult of celebrity. These cultural traits have pervaded our experience of life, and have troubled us in various ways. Aware of the challenge of living out an authentic expression of Christian life, and of simply bearing the pain of being human, we crafted a set of ideas that would guide and support us. Living the rhythm has helped us discern – individually and collectively – right ways of living, and right responses to the challenges we face in culture and in ourselves.

The rhythm of life was inspired by the example of both ancient and modern-day faith communities. In particular, the Benedictine and Franciscan traditions, and our friends in the loose networks of the emerging church and new monasticism. Moot is a church community, however, not a monastic order. To attempt to order our lives as monks, nuns and friars do would simply not be possible. Great care was taken to make the rhythm of life an achievable goal, not a burden we would collapse under the weight of, or a stick we could beat ourselves with. Our rhythm has been the backbeat that marked time, which helped make sense of the chaos, pulling us back on track when we got lost. It has served to remind us of the kind of music we set out to play, the type of lives we want to lead.

Countercultural

Many of us in Moot are consciously aware that we have not understood Christian faith in clear terms. Ideas of 'conversion', 'discipleship', 'salvation' and 'rebirth' have been difficult for us. In part this is because it has been the vocation of the Moot community to challenge dichotomising formulations of Christian faith, to stand against Christian sub-cultures that sanctify and uncritically embrace the ills of culture, and to search for an expression of faith that feels authentic to us. Those

of us without a church background have appreciated the largely jargon-free zone that Moot seeks to be, and that the ability to belong to the community has been prioritised over any requirement to believe a particular set of doctrines. Another reason for this lack of clarity is our desire to get beyond exclusive, fundamentalist expressions of faith. We have therefore been content with a certain provisionality with regards to all God-talk. This means that we have consciously sought to embrace both redemptive and incarnational theologies; the consequences of this are that, on one hand, we desire to face our brokenness and need for change, and, on the other, we believe in the unconditional love of God, and in God's desire for peace and justice on the earth. We have sought to maintain this difficult tension of the middle way.

Trinitarian

In the last five years, throughout our explorations, we have discovered the importance of a trinitarian understanding of God – as have many other new monastic communities. This has led us to believe that the nature of God models what ecclesial communities are called to be. As God models perfect love, justice, and inclusion in the Trinity, so we are called to embody these values in community. In this way of thinking, worship becomes participation in the Godhead; mission becomes catching up with what God is already doing; and community is about having depth of relationship, with a sense of God's presence in the midst.

As a practical expression of what the life of faith might look like, the rhythm of life is an expression of this call. It is a humble articulation of the *how* of Christian life, of faith lived out in hope and love. The question before us now, however, is how can we deepen our collective and individual faith expression, without losing this sense of identity and call? Can we begin to make sense of, and go deeper with, terms such as 'conversion', 'discipleship', 'salvation' and 'rebirth', without making the errors we set out to avoid?

Our Rhythm of Life

We live the rhythm of life through presence, acceptance, creativity, balance, accountability and hospitality.

Presence

We commit to journeying together with God and each other, by meeting together as a community in prayer and worship, in friendship and grief and happiness. We aim to be more than just a group of individuals or anonymous people in the city, rather an open community, a hopeful sign.

Acceptance

We desire to accept both ourselves and other people as they are, and to allow people to say what they believe without fear of judgment. We want to create a safe space where people feel welcomed and at home. We hope to learn from all those in and outside the community.

Creativity

We want to have an open approach to how we learn, live and encounter God in the plurality of our city and the world. We wish to be creative in our worship, in prayer, and with the Christian tradition, in our lives, in learning, in our theology and with the arts.

Balance

We aspire to live with integrity in the city, striving as a community for balance between work, rest and play. We wish to develop healthy spiritual disciplines such as daily prayer, meditation and contemplation, drawing on the ancient Christian paths. We want to live sustainably, and within our means. We desire to not be simply consumers, but people committed to giving and receiving in all of life.

Accountability

We desire to be accountable to one another, to grow and journey together, listening to each other and the wider Christian community for wisdom rather than trusting only ourselves. We want to have a willingness to share life, rather than to privatise it; we seek to walk together in a deep way rather than as strangers who only know the surface of each other.

Hospitality

We wish to welcome everyone we encounter, when we are gathered and when we are dispersed, extending Christ's gracious invitation to relationship, meaning and life in all its fullness.

Our Evolving Context

The past few years have both proved the true worth of our rhythm of life, and revealed its weaknesses. While it has provided a focus and a clearer identity for Moot, it has stopped short (consciously so) of making recommendations on how to actually 'get in time'. Aiming at being more a spiritual 'backbeat' than a comprehensive score, it has no concrete application. This proposal would like to suggest that we are entering a new phase of our community's life, a phase which requires a deepening of the practice of faith, and more guidance on how to structure it. The following quotation from Abbot Jamison describes the situation in the wider context of society:

It is strange that while contemporary society places so much emphasis on external freedom, interior freedom is often given short shrift. Sometimes the way people speak about the human heart implies that in this interior world there is no freedom, that it is a fixed world that cannot be changed. Those with interior struggles are often held where they are by sympathy and understanding that stop short of real help to move forwards. Anger, pride, gluttony and greed, these and other feelings are not categorised by our society as disabilities yet they do prevent people from living the lives they would really like to live, either because they have a negative impact on the person experiencing them or because they have a negative impact on other people.

(2009: 36)

There are two distinctive features of the new context we find ourselves in. Firstly, the process of discerning our collective vocation has led to negotiations with the Diocese of London to set up the Lounge Project. This would provide a new centre for our communal life, for worship and for mission. We believe that the step up in maturity and commitment necessary to fulfil our call will require a deepening of the practice of our faith – something strong enough to guide our community into health in the midst of the many demanding and wonderful opportunities that will arise in the years to come.

Secondly, with some years' experience of living with the rhythm, we now have the benefit of hindsight. To be human is to struggle with the nature of existence, and not necessarily to grow in contentment with that nature. Society's response to the pain of life is often (though not solely) to treat the symptoms of the pain with the sticking plaster of consumption. Cultural ills such as this are pervasive and powerful and as members of the Moot community we have not been immune. In fact, we have often felt buffeted and beaten up by the onslaught of a zeitgeist we are no less vulnerable to for being critical of. We suggest that the rhythm has, by itself, not provided a strong enough narrative to foster adequately healthy responses to the pain of being human, nor to counteract the dominant narrative offered by culture.

New Hope and a Future

For some years now the phrase 'second naïveté' has emerged as a hopeful sign that it might be possible for those struggling with traditional forms of church and doctrine to get beyond their problems, transcend them in some way, and find that it was still possible to have a life-giving relationship with God within the Christian churches. Ian Mobsby picked up this theme and tried to elucidate a possible way forward:

The pattern of faith and doubt is a healthy expression of Christian discipleship. ... It can be seen as a cycle of life, death and resurrection, eventually being led by God into a more mature faith. ... Only by finding what Paul Ricoeur calls a second naïveté (or what Dave Tomlinson has dubbed a 'second innocence') – the ability to get beyond our doubts and thoughts, emotions and feelings, can we hear God for what God says. Only by letting go and acknowledging our need for God will we allow God in. (2008: 102)

We believe that the Christian tradition still has something vital to say about finding 'rest for our souls', about the mysterious reality that is salvation. It concerns an often misunderstood story known as "the Gospel"; this story contains a secret often particularly inaccessible – hidden in plain sight – to the religious, the wise and the powerful. This is because knowledge, power and

religion carry with them potential trappings – false horizons that conceal our need of transformation. It is not for nothing that Christ is said to have welcomed those who were ‘weary and heavy burdened’, and those who ‘had ears to hear’. It seems that Christ targeted his message at those who knew they needed a different approach to life. As Richard Rohr says, ‘practice of prayer we can choose to do ourselves; the suffering is done to us.’ (Rohr, 2009: xx) Our task is not to go out looking for this pain, but to simply take the opportunity, when it comes, to turn and face it. In facing our pain, we can do so because of the example of Christ who ‘became sin’ so that we could be transformed. (2 Cor. 5. 16-21) As many in the community can testify to, this journey begins when, broken and bruised as we are, we admit our failure to find life under our own steam. As the gospel passage then implies (Mat. 11.28), what must follow is a freely chosen surrender of one’s life, and the taking up of the life of God. Jesus expresses this in terms of taking on his ‘yoke’. In many ways it’s a crude metaphor, but the ironic idea is that we find inner freedom by being harnessed by God for his/her purposes – not our own.

In line with Moot’s established character, we propose that inner freedom can be achieved not through a system of belief that stipulates what to believe, but a method of Christian life that forms us in faith, hope and love. Let us not worry that in pursuing inner freedom in this way we will lose the essential insights of our community. Richard Rohr, one of our guides on this way, defines conversion not as withdrawal from culture, or any isolating ‘holier than thou’ attitude or creed, but, curiously, as a ‘subversive rearrangement of reality’. (Rohr, 2009: xx) The change we seek is much more dangerous than merely believing something new: ‘It is more about “unbelieving” the disguise that we all are.’ (Rohr, 2009: xix)

‘If we are unwilling to live askew for a while, to be set off-balance, to wait on the ever-spacious threshold, we remain in the same old room for all our lives. ... If we will not balance knowing with a certain kind of open ended *not knowing* – nothing new seems to happen. Thus it is called ‘faith’ and demands living with a certain degree of anxiety and holding a very real amount of tension. We have to be trained how to do this. The only two

things strong enough to train us in this are *suffering* and *prayer*.' (Rohr, 2009: xx)

We believe that inner freedom is made possible by a lifelong process of 'conversion'. Despite what may commonly be understood by this term, we see it as a rest-of-life pursuit, as a turning towards our pain and towards God, as a life-long refusal to continue any longer as slaves to our fear and pain. To put it in more psychological language, conversion can be thought of transformation of the 'ego-self' – the unseating of 'our vital lie', or the 'false self.' (Rohr, 2009: xix). These are hardly novel ideas, in fact they are new names for the classic Christian teaching of the 'old self' (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 2:15; 4:22-24; and Colossians 3:9-11).

We therefore invite you to discuss the following practical framework as a guide for daily formation in Christian faith, and for the real and lasting transformation of our hearts and minds. It consists of three parts:

1. *Spiritual and emotional postures* that can facilitate mindfulness of God's presence and kingdom in our lives.
2. *Spiritual practices* that, when applied appropriately and consistently to our lives will facilitate transforming encounters with God.
3. *A framework* – for eventual personal reflection in the context of spiritual direction – for naming and thinking about the particular problems encountered in the life of faith, and how these might be transformed through a discipline of spiritual postures and practices.

Spiritual Postures

The word ‘posture’ evokes a sense not of how one thinks or feels about any particular thing, but of how one *is* in any given situation. The comparison with physical posture is useful here, and one’s spiritual posture should be thought of as the way “you are” spiritually.

By focusing primarily on one’s spiritual posture, one undercuts the modern Christian tendency to focus on what “you do” (morality) or what “you believe” (doctrine). For too long these have been the sole arbiters of the healthy spiritual life; they do have their place, but of *primary* importance is the experience of being in relationship with God. Vitaly, this concerns how “we are” in the present moment. Postures relate to our *way of being* in the world.

I believe God asks us to be aware, to practice the art of noticing God’s transformational work in our lives. He gently and lovingly realigns us, guiding us into postures of faith that reflect his love. We Christ-followers claim to be the people of God, to live lives that reflect who our God is, and yet many times we are wholly unaware of the small choices we make daily that show him to be completely other than divine. How many ailments do we unknowingly cause ourselves and our God because we are unwilling or unable to notice? We have not developed the art of noticing. We must learn to be still, to listen, to be mindful, not only of ourselves, but of the One outside ourselves. In developing the art of noticing and practicing the postures of our faith in God, we begin to realize the spiritual health we yearn for.

(From the introduction to *Faith Postures* by Holly Sprink)

As Christians seeking to discover the life of God in our daily lives, spiritual postures are of key importance for they dictate our potential awareness of God’s presence. God’s kingdom or presence is The Source of our life and we *must* be connected to God to experience God’s life. Just as our human friendships wither when we are not regularly present and attentive to them, so our primary relationship with God withers when we don’t attend to it. We offer these postures as a means of beginning to attend to the present moment, and therefore to be present to God.

- *Openness*
- *Mindfulness*
- *Expectancy*
- *Wonder*
- *Gratitude*
- *Compassion*
- *Obedience*

Spiritual Practices

The starting place for all true religion is in the sense of encounter had with the divine. For Christians this is first and foremost found in the person of Jesus. Out of the encounter with Jesus the primary virtues of faith, hope and love are born, and continue to grow in us as we mature into the people God calls us to be. This encounter is always one of love, as the New Testament continually makes clear. We recall the story of the woman who poured out expensive perfume on Jesus' feet as he reclined at dinner with Simon the Leper (Mark 14). She may have known that Simon would resent her presence and rebuke her, but all she cared about was loving Jesus in return for the way he'd loved her.

This experience – of love that we never thought possible, love that compels us to lavish Jesus with worship in response – is available to us all. Indeed, Jesus seems to have considered it a signature of the gospel he was preaching, saying that wherever it was preached her act of generous love should be remembered. Such transformative love enables us to find inner freedom from the thoughts that distort us. We become caught up in a love bigger than anything we could muster in our own strength, and consequently we find we can love God, others and ourselves more and more.

Just like spiritual postures, spiritual practices help us develop mindfulness of God's presence. By practicing a daily pattern of prayer and meditation, for example, we begin to become more and more attentive to God, who is the 'ground of our being' (Paul Tillich's phrase). Spiritual practices therefore enable us to encounter God's love, and in so doing, they help us in the very concrete and real discovery that our 'life is now hidden with Christ in God' (Colossians 3. 3). In short, spiritual practices *facilitate* the reality of "salvation", of a relationship

with God that frees us from the need always to do what we want to do, of thinking what we've been conditioned to think, and of being defined by our emotions.

These practices are articulated as broadly as possible, so that each person can, perhaps with the guidance of a spiritual director, craft a set of disciplines suitable to their own personality, daily rhythms and commitments. N.B. These practices do not represent salvation, and salvation in no way depends upon them; they merely help facilitate relationship with God.

- The practice of prayer and meditation (*daily, rhythmic, individual and in community*).
- The practice of mercy and justice (*personally, locally and globally*).
- The practice and facilitation of communal worship (*Contemplative services, Eleven O'clock Service, Eucharist and Compline*).
- The practice of learning (*discussions, biblical reflection, reading, spiritual direction and retreats*).
- The practice of presence (*mindfulness, meditation, prayer, developing and maintaining deep relationships in the community, and the practice of financial presence*).
- The practice of mission (*assisting people to explore and experience Christian spirituality, being a soul friend to those in and outside of the community*).
- The practice of passionate living (*living life to the full, but also the passion of sharing in God's suffering for the world*).

Virtues and the Thoughts that Distort Us

This final section has been placed at the end because it is not at all a good place to start. We have chosen to include it here for the same reason that Saint Paul, while saying that all who try to live by "the law" are under a curse (Gal. 3.10), says that it is not at all opposed to the promises of God (Gal. 3.21). A list of virtues, like the Old Testament law, is a bit of a mixed blessing. With intense irony, Paul asks the wayward Galatians, 'Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?' (Gal. 3.5) In other words, consciously attempting to be virtuous isn't going to get us anywhere at all. It is a total dead end.

Jesus taught a whole new approach to the fulfilment of the law (or the development of virtues) in the famous section of Matthew gospel known as ‘the Beatitudes’ (Mat. 5. 1 – 12). Despite the difficulty this passage has caused so many scholars down through the centuries, it is perhaps safe to take Jesus as saying that the blessing of God is to be found in part through the experience of failure and pain, rather than any successful fulfilment of the law under our own strength. All of this is to say that the following set of virtues is not something we can or should even attempt to achieve directly. In fact, any such attempt will lead us back into moralism and judgmentalism. The virtuous life seems to be a kind of by-product of being in relationship with God, and not something we get to have control over so as to be “better” than someone else, or “holier than thou”.

We believe that in the context of a study of the Enneagram, or in spiritual direction, this framework could become very useful in naming and understanding key issues that can put our lives on hold and prevent us from experiencing life ‘to full’. (John 10.10)

	Virtues	Thoughts that distort
About the body	Moderation (Sobriety) Chaste Love (Innocence) Generosity (Non-attachment)	Gluttony (Intemperance) Lust (Shamelessness) Greed (Avarice)
About heart and mind	Patience (Serenity) Gladness Courage Spiritual Awareness	Anger (Impatience) Sadness Fear (Anxiety) Spiritual Carelessness
About the human spirit	Magnanimity Humility Honesty (Truthfulness)	Vanity Pride Deceit (Untruth)

Application

We do not want to propose any set method or application for these virtues, postures and practices. It seems appropriate to us, given that Moot is not a monastery or a friary and does not wish to follow a rigid monastic rule, that each individual apply any agreed virtues, postures and practices to their own lives in a personal way.

We do propose that any set of virtues, postures and practices agreed upon should be incorporated into the rhythm of life, and that our annual rhythm of life service represent an act of commitment to both parts of the rhythm of life – aspiration and application. We believe that the combination of a serious framework for spiritual health and growth, and the ability to apply it personally, is optimum, providing the maximum level of inclusiveness without sacrificing the potential benefit of discipline. We believe this framework, and tools such as the Enneagram, will promote an ever-increasing sense of commitment to the spiritual path, as well as providing room enough for those drawn so to delve deeply. It would, we believe, be a mistake to create a community of two speeds or tiers, where a core group is visibly seen to practice a deeper spirituality than the others. This should embrace the main body of the community, and all those who consider Moot their spiritual home.

Some useful quotations

'Let's be honest, we would sooner have control than real conversion. We would sooner have well-oiled church societies than transformed people. Cosmetic piety takes away our anxiety about God and about ourselves, but it does not address the real and subtle ways that we "lose our soul". (Rohr, 2009: xvii)

'We are all partial knowers; all verbalisations are filled with biography, preference genius, and past hurts. We are always *invested* in our knowing. We are all moving into Heraclitus's ever-moving stream. This leads us to a necessary humility and to a very unsettling sense of the certitude that we all want and need. It seems we must somehow "kneel" to hear and see correctly.' (Rohr, 2009: xviii)

'The Enneagram is much more dangerous and much more demanding than believing things. It is more about "unbelieving" the disguise that we all are. Ernst Becker called it "our vital lie". Merton called it the false self. The Enneagram gets right to the point and calls it our sin.' (Rohr, 2009: xix)

'The Enneagram has emerged as a tool that is forcing many of us to a brutal and converting honesty about good and evil and about the ways that we hide from ourselves and therefore hide from God. It tries to address this "compromise with life" and this "evasion of reality" that the ego is so invested in and that the ego often promotes.' (Rohr, 2009: xvi)

'The vast majority of religion is "translative" rather than transformative. It is concerned with bolstering up the separate self with meanings, rituals, moralities and group conformity rather than dismantling the separate self so that it can fall into the Great Self of God. We've had far too much priesthood and almost no room for prophets. It creates a very imbalanced religion.' (Rohr, 2009: xvi)

'It is the things that you cannot do anything *about* and the things that you cannot do anything *with* that do something with you.' (Rohr, 2009: xx)

'When the first disciples of Jesus wanted to make the whole process into right rituals and right roles, and by implication right belief systems (common to all

religions), Jesus told them, “You do not know what you are asking. Until you drink of the cup that I must drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I will be immersed in” (Mark 10.38), you basically do not know what I am talking about.’ (Rohr, 2009: xx)

‘Christians are inclined to speak with gusto about how grace alone is efficacious, but we have no answer when people ask how they can experience this redeeming, life-changing grace. Nowadays, many people report that the ways of the East have helped them to rediscover their blocked-up faith or deepen their prayer life.’ (Rohr, 2009: xiii)

Bibliography and Reference List

Scott A. Bessenecker, 2006, *The New Friars*, Downers Grove: IVP

Inspirational story of new monasticism drawing new communities to radical spiritual practices and social action.

Shane Claiborne, 2006, *The Irresistible Revolution*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan

Inspiration to go deeper with communal spiritual practices in a whole-of-life way.

Andy Freeman and Pete Greig, *Punk Monk*, Ventura: Regal Books

Exploring new monasticism as a revolutionary approach to living out the message of Christ.

Abbot Christopher Jamison, 2006, *Finding Sanctuary*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson

First of two books opening up spiritual practices of monastics that bring inner and outer freedom.

Abbot Christopher Jamison, 2009, *Finding Happiness*, London: Phoenix

In many ways our key text, Jamison articulates the ancient Benedictine tradition with relevance and force for the twenty-first century.

John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes*, London: Bantam Books

An insightful, poetic devotional guide to the inner life.

Brother Ramon, *The Flame of Sacred Love*, Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship

A robust and invigorating, practical and inspirational invitation to growing in God's love.

Richard Rohr, 2009, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, New York: Crossroad Publishing

All about the Enneagram, and applying it to the spiritual life.

Richard Rohr, 2003, *Simplicity*, New York: Cross Road Publishing

Opening up approaches to prayer and meditation.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, The Rubta House, 2005, *Schools for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, Eugene: Cascade Books
The story of the birth and vision of new monasticism in the USA.

William J. Short, OFM, *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition*, London, DLT Press
Overview of the key themes and figures in the movement, and its relevance for today.

Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass*, Chicago: Loyola Press
A modern guide to Ignatian spirituality.

Ray Simpson, 2009, *High Street Monasteries*, Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew Publishing
The story of the birth and vision of new monasticism in the UK.

Holly Sprink, 2009, *Faith Postures*, Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys

Dave Tomlinson, 2008, *Re-enchanting Christianity*, London: Canterbury Press
A book about faith and theology lived in dialogue with contemporary culture.

Richard Woods, 1998, *Mystery and Prophecy The Dominican Tradition*, London: DLT
Exploration of Dominican spirituality and practices that help inform new monastics.